

Año Nuevo State Park Teacher's Guide

Spring Elephant Seal Guided School Walks

April – May



California State Parks

The Año Nuevo State Park Teachers Guide is designed to provide you with information to successfully bringing your group to the park

Our hope is that, by drawing on the information provided, you will be able to tailor your individual class needs to achieve the most rewarding visit possible.

It is of the utmost importance that you fully realize you are entering a nature wildlife area and the potential dangers that presents.

Your attention to the safety aspects of this document is paramount.

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This *Guide* may be downloaded from the internet at
www.parks.ca.gov/AnoNuevo

Cover Photo by Ranger Frank Balthis, Año Nuevo State Park



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Introduction

Fifty-five miles south of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge, a low, rocky windswept point juts out into the Pacific Ocean. This promontory was named Punta del Año Nuevo (New Year's Point) for the day Don Sebastian Vizcaino first sighted it on January 3, 1603.

Originally Año Nuevo was home to some of the first humans to inhabit the North American continent over 6000 years ago. Their village sites, in the form of kitchen middens, are still visible today. Año Nuevo was an important locale during the Spanish settlement period of the 1700's. Año Nuevo and its native peoples, the Quiroste, who are now known as part of the Ohlone, hosted explorers and missionaries such as Captain Gaspar de Portola and Father Juan Crespi. Originally pristine grassland along the San Mateo coast, Año Nuevo was converted to cattle ranches in support of the missionary system. Later it was converted to dairy farming in support of the cheese industry.

For the naturalist Año Nuevo holds a treasure chest of gems. Overhead the Harrier hawks are joined by kites and turkey vultures. There are over 300 species of birds that nest or visit during their migrations. Land mammals include bobcat, coyote, mountain lion, mule deer, bush rabbits and voles. Western fence lizards abound on the trail, the endangered San Francisco garter snakes and red legged frog make their homes in and around the pond. The vast *variety* of flora affords a "hands on" discussion of native versus invasive plant life.

Between April and May, adult female northern elephant seals come ashore to rest and molt their fur on the sand dunes and beaches. This "catastrophic molt", in which all of their fur falls off at once to make way for a new coat, is quite the spectacle to behold. Juvenile elephant seals can also be seen during this time, resting, playing, and vocalizing.

Año Nuevo State Park is truly a park of many faces...enjoy one aspect or touch on them all.

Welcome!



Mike Goodkind

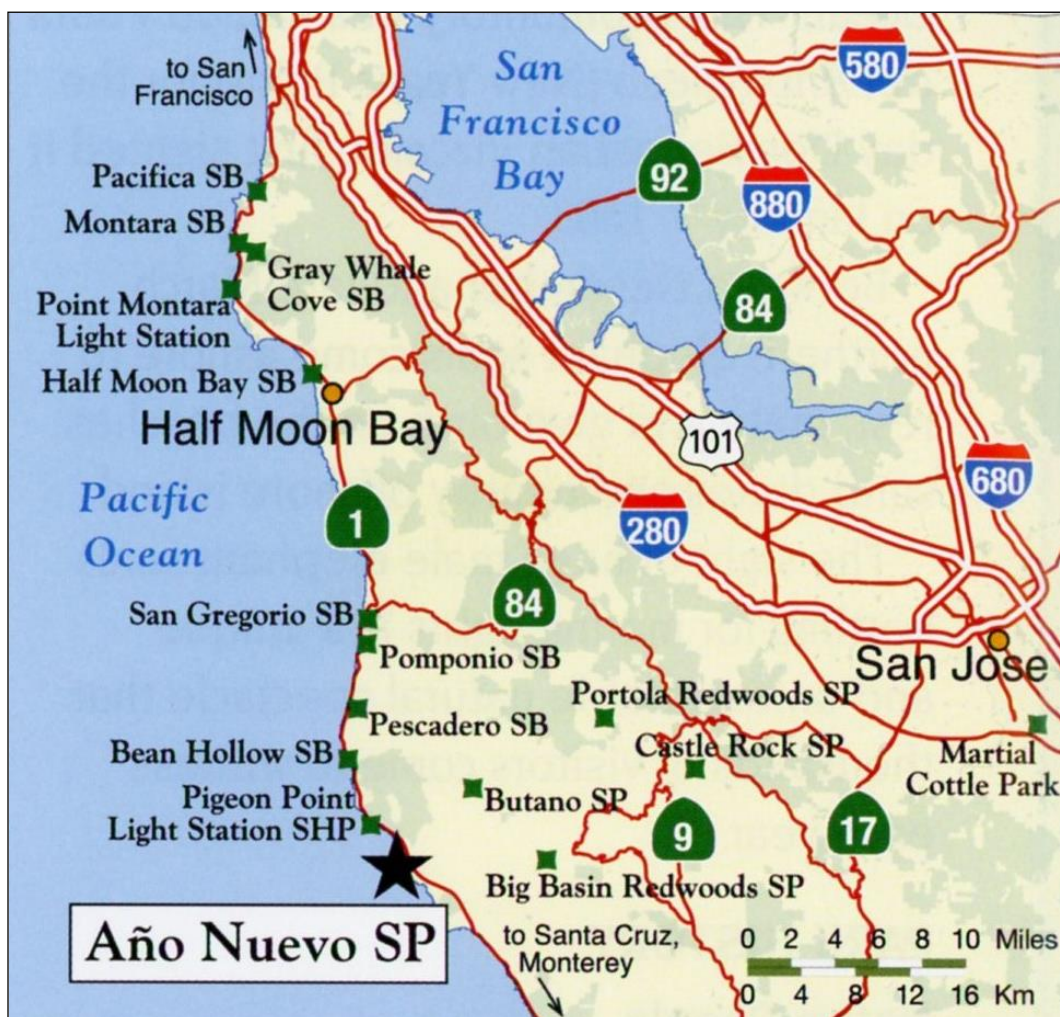


Directions to Año Nuevo State Park

Año Nuevo State Park is located on Highway 1, approximately 20 miles north of Santa Cruz and 25 miles south of Half Moon Bay. Travel time from San Francisco or the mid-peninsula is about 1.5 hours; from San Jose/South Bay Area about 1.25 hours; from East Bay is about 2 hours. Allow extra time during rainy/foggy or otherwise poor weather conditions.



Note: Weather conditions on the coast are almost always radically different than the Bay Area. Check your local weather sources before departure. Allow enough time for a safe journey.



Park Facilities

The buildings and surrounding grounds comprising the headquarters of Año Nuevo State Park were once part of the historic Dickerman/Steele Ranch known as the Cypress Dairy. In 2008 these buildings were restored and now serve visitors in a new capacity.



Marine Education Center (MEC) Once a dairy barn, it now contains educational displays about the elephant seals; the island foghorn/light station history; the bird, marine and land animals living within the park; the early Ohlone inhabitants; and the Steele family, who farmed the property through the 1950's.

The MEC also houses the park Bookstore. The store offers a variety of educational materials, souvenirs, light clothing, hats, some light rain gear and bottled water. **No food is sold in the park.**



Theater Originally a horse barn, it is now a media center and meeting place. There is a continuous looped 30 minute video entitled "The Life of the Elephant Seal" as well as other interesting displays about the surrounding area.

Ranger Office The Creamery, where the Dickerman/Steele Family made their famous cheese now houses the Park Ranger Headquarters.

Drinking Water Visitors can find water fountains in the plaza formed by the Ranger Office, Theater and Marine Education Center. Other than the fountain at the main restroom building, these are the only water fountains in the park. Bottled water is sold in the bookstore.

Picnic Areas There are two main picnic areas. The larger of the picnic areas is located near the Marine Education Center. It has a commanding view of the park and Año Nuevo Island, Año Nuevo Bay, and is ADA compliant. A second picnic area is located near the parking lot.

Restrooms Flush toilet restrooms are located near the parking lot. These are also ADA compliant. The staging area has two chemical toilets. There are no restrooms available in the Natural Preserve.



School Group Tour Opportunities

Año Nuevo State Park is an amazing destination for school field trips. Teachers and students alike will find themselves immersed in a wild place just hours from their hometown classrooms. The park provides many educational opportunities to take what students learn in the classroom and give them the gift of real life examples outside of their textbooks. From wild marine mammals to sweeping landscapes of diverse ecosystems, Año Nuevo is the ultimate classroom waiting to be explored.

Año Nuevo's Natural Preserve area is available for tours during the winter and spring. There are two distinct time periods in which visitation is allowed, the **Breeding Season** (Dec 15 through Mar 31) and the **Spring Season** (April through May).

The Breeding Season (4 – 12 grade)

December 15 – March 31

The **Breeding Season requires reservations** and is by docent-guided tour only. Visitation is the highest during this season as this is when the elephant seals are most active. Those wishing to view the seals must be on a tour.

The Spring Season (1 – 12 grade)

April-May

The **Spring Season does not require reservations and is self-guided.** During the spring, summer and fall months seals cluster along the beaches and molt their skin and fur. Docent guides may be requested by contacting the docent coordination office a minimum of two weeks in advance. There is no additional charge for the docent guide. The molting season receives fewer park visitors and allows more flexibility for school visits.



Spring Season Seal Viewing

April – May

Every season at Año Nuevo brings new cycles to the park as well as a change of pace. The spring can be a great time to visit the park, especially for 1 – 3 grade classes, due to more time allotted for hiking out to the elephant seals, more time for viewing, additional docent support, and often better weather.

The spring season self-guided tours are available starting April 1 through May 31, seven days a week. Visitor permits are required to enter the Natural Preserve. Groups can obtain a free permit at the park Entrance Station or at the Marine Education Center between 9 am and 3:30 pm.

All visitors will need to leave the Natural preserve by 5pm. However, the rest of the park remains open until sunset.

Caution

Due to the physical nature and total time requirements (**3.0 hours**) of the 3 mile hike, this program may be difficult for small children. Strollers and umbrellas are also not permitted in the wildlife areas.



Arrival at the Park

Upon arrival at the Entrance Station please inform the park attendant if you have arranged for a docent-led tour. You will then proceed to the parking lot.

Buses and large vehicles should park in the designated spots. Water and bathrooms are available immediately nearby.

The parking lot includes a picnic area, water fountain and restrooms, the only flush toilets on the premises. The lower end of the parking lot leads to the Marine Education Center, another picnic area and access to the beach.



Docent-Led Group Tours

Although the park is self-guided during this time, schools can contact the Docent Coordination office at (650) 879-2032 to request a docent-led tour of the park. These tours can be tailored to cover topics specially requested by teachers to support what students are learning in the classroom. There is no limitation to the size of your group. Please request a docent guide at least two weeks in advance.

If you are meeting docents to lead your group, you will meet them at the parking lot picnic tables. Teachers and group leaders can take this opportunity to discuss the day's hike with the docents.

Students will be broken into tour groups of around 20 plus two or more chaperones. One chaperone for each ten students is required although one chaperone for each five students is recommended. Please identify these groups before you arrive at the park.



Name tags with first name and name of school are helpful.

Staging Area



The Staging Area is located about half-way between the Marine Education Center and Año Nuevo Point. Groups pause here to take a brief snack break before entering the natural preserve. The snack break will be roughly 15 minutes long. Taking lunch at this time will not be permitted. While waiting at the staging area, students and teachers can investigate several interpretive panels and objects on display.

Bathrooms are located nearby and are the last opportunity to use a bathroom for the next 90 minutes. Teachers are advised to encourage all students to visit the bathrooms before the tours starts. There are no bathrooms in the preserve.

Danger Alerts

Be aware of your surroundings at all times. You are in a “wild” environment. Be aware of possible sources of bodily injury.

1. **Stay 25 feet back from cliff edges.** Steep, unstable cliffs can crumble under your weight resulting in falls and serious injury.
2. **Respect the Sea.** Local waters are cold and rough. **Lifeguards are not available.** Beware of large waves that could knock you down and riptides that could sweep you out to sea.
3. **Poison Oak** grows along the trails leading to the natural preserve. Avoid touching the leaves and branches. The plant’s oils will cause itching and blisters. If you suspect contact with poison oak wash the contacted area with COLD water and soap to remove as much of the oil as possible. Set aside any clothing as well to be washed. Picking up sticks is also not advisable—these can be poison oak branches!
4. **Ticks** are found throughout the park along trail edges. Stay on trails and avoid brushing against plants. Check clothing frequently to brush off any “tick hitchhikers”.

Do a full body inspection when you return to the parking lot.

Chaperones

Chaperones play a **vital** role in the success of a tour. It is their responsibility to assist the docent in group management during the guided walk, help keep the group together at all times, help quiet the students down when the docent is speaking, spread themselves out among a group (i.e. at least one in the front, middle, and back), encourage students to ask questions and participate, and ask the docent how they can be of help.

Parking Fees

Parking fees are waived for K-12 school programs.



What to Bring

Weather and trail conditions are a major component of your visit. The weather can easily change from the parking lot to the seal viewing area: the temperature can change by more than 20 degrees; winds can go from a light breeze to 25 mph; completely sunny to dense fog or rain. Preparing students on what to bring is one of the secrets to a successful Año Nuevo visit.

Clothing/Footwear

Warm, layered clothing and sturdy footwear are a must.

The layered combination of t-shirt, sweater, hooded sweatshirt or hooded jacket, long pants, hat and rain resistant outer wear are recommended. Gloves and knit hats will help you stay warm.

Umbrellas are not allowed in the natural preserve. High winds can blow them away and endanger wildlife. On rainy days, ponchos are recommended as a substitute. These are sold in the park store.



Footwear must be able to withstand gravel, mud, dirt and sandy surfaces. **DO NOT ALLOW OPEN TOED SHOES OR SANDLES TO BE WORN.** Waterproof footwear is recommended.

If rain is forecasted, consider bringing a “change of clothes & shoes” for the ride home. Travelling in wet clothing is not fun. Leave the change of clothes in the bus/car while on the tour.

Food & Drink

Food is not sold at the park. There are two picnic areas located near the parking lot and the Marine Education Center. Eating while in the natural preserve is prohibited. Snacking during the staging area’s “snack break” is highly recommended.

Bottled water is available for sale in the bookstore; water fountains are in the parking lot restrooms and in the courtyard near the park office. Carrying small quantities of water on the tour is recommended, especially on hot sunny days.

Consider bringing enough food/snacks/drinks to allow for a pre-tour snack and a post-tour snack. Please make sure all trash is disposed of in the proper containers.



Money

A small amount of money (less than \$10) for purchasing books, souvenirs, etc., is recommended.

Backpacks

Backpacks are allowed and encouraged. Due to the nature of the hike, they should be kept to a minimum in weight and volume. Pack only what you really need.

Possible items would include:

- Binoculars
- Cameras
- Sunscreen
- Alternate clothing items (hat, gloves, sweatshirt)
- Water bottle
- Study guide/worksheets

Overall Trip Planning

Before bringing your class to Año Nuevo State Park, you may want to visit the park to become familiar with the area.

You will be on-site 3 to 4 hours.

Recommended time allotment considerations when you plan your trip...

1. Travel time to the park
2. Pre-tour activities (30 minutes to 1 hour)
 - Restroom break
 - Snack time
 - Visitor Center exhibits, park video
 - Visit Park Bookstore (recommend making purchases post-tour so you don't have to carry extra items in your pack)
3. Tour (2 ½ to 3 hours hours)
4. Post-tour activities (30-45 minutes)
 - Snack time
 - Restroom break
 - Last visit to the bookstore. (Note: Before going on your hike check to see when the store closes)



Año Nuevo Teacher Checklist

- ☐ Determine desired tour date
- ☐ Determine total number of people taking the tour
(Students + Chaperones + yourself)
- ☐ Contact the docent coordination office; send email ASAP to AñoNuevo.GuidedWalks@parks.ca.gov
- ☐ Recruit chaperones
- ☐ Arrange transportation by bus or private vehicles
- ☐ Issue parent consent form and student checklist to each student
- ☐ Prepare time line & responsibility checklist for your tour
- ☐ Prepare in school pre-tour lessons
- ☐ Review “Rules & Regulations” and “Danger Alerts” with students/chaperones the day of the tour. Watch School Tour Prep Video with students http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1112
- ☐ Review “What to Bring” and “What not to Bring” section with students the day prior to the tour. Provide parents with the lists for review with their children as part of the permission slip.
- ☐ Post tour review with students



Año Nuevo Student/Parent Checklist

- ☐ Signed permission slip

- ☐ Prepare primary clothing/footwear (Dress in layers; clothes should be breathable as in cotton, multiple lighter layers are better than one heavy layer)
 - 1. Jacket or Sweater with hood
 - 2. Rain cover/coat if rain is forecasted (umbrellas are not allowed on tour)
 - 3. Trail worthy shoes...water proof
 - 5. Hat

- ☐ Prepare “change of clothing/footwear” if rain is forecasted
 - What will get wet and need to be changed for a comfortable ride home?

- ☐ Prepare backpack items
 - 1. Binoculars
 - 2. Cameras
 - 3. Sunscreen
 - 4. Alternate clothing items (hat, gloves, sweatshirt)
 - 5. Water bottle

- ☐ Prepare Snacks & Drinks (no food is sold at park, bottled water only, water fountain is available)
 - 1. Lunch or snack before the tour.
 - 2. Bottled water only during the tour
 - 3. Lunch or snack after the tour

- ☐ Money for Bookstore visit
 - 1. No more than \$10.00 recommended

- ☐ Review “What to Bring” section with students

See teacher for list provided by the park or refer to park website.

